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## Iran faces 'serious consequences' over nukes

By Jitendra Joshi | October 22, 2007

**VICE-PRESIDENT Dick Cheney said today the United States would not permit Iran to get nuclear weapons and warned of "serious consequences" if it continues to enrich uranium.**

Mr Cheney, considered the toughest hardliner on Iran in the US administration, did not specify what measures might be taken against Tehran, however, and did not mention the possibility of military action.

"The Iranian regime needs to know that if it stays on its present course, the international community is prepared to impose serious consequences," he said in a speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"The United States joins other nations in sending a clear message: We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon," said the hawkish Mr Cheney, who reportedly favours military strikes against the Islamic republic.

"Our country and the entire international community cannot stand by as a terror-supporting state fulfils its most aggressive ambitions," he said, accusing Iran anew of abetting attacks on US troops in Iraq.

Iran was "the world's most active state sponsor of terror", added the vice-president, after President George W Bush warned last week that a nuclear-equipped Iran evoked the threat of "World War III".

### Harsh words over Iraq

Mr Cheney also rebuffed US critics who want a swift end to the war in Iraq.

"We're going to complete the mission so that another generation of Americans does not need to go back and do it again," he said.

Mr Cheney's terminology recalled the warnings issued in 2002 by the UN security council that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein faced "serious consequences" if he failed to come clean on his alleged stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction.

Several US media reports have said Cheney is encouraging Bush to consider missile strikes that could go beyond Iranian nuclear facilities to take in command-and-control systems of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Campaigning for the 2008 White House nomination, top Republicans and Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton insist they will never tolerate Iran being in a position to menace its neighbours and Israel with atomic arms.

Ms Clinton last month voted for a Senate resolution that declared the Revolutionary Guards a terror organisation - a step her Democratic rival Barack Obama said represented a "blank cheque" for President Bush to wage war on Iran.

Iran, which insists it only wants peaceful nuclear energy, has brushed aside US warnings, and announced today its top nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, had resigned and was being replaced by an ally of hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"Iran is pursuing technology that can be used to develop nuclear weapons. The world knows this," Mr Cheney said, noting that Iran had refused to stop enriching uranium despite two rounds of sanctions from the UN Security Council.

He said "the regime continues to do so, and continues to practice delay and deception in an obvious attempt to buy time".


Mr Cheney's new warning came five months after he declared from the hangar deck of a powerfully-armed US aircraft carrier in the Gulf that the United States would not let Iran acquire nuclear arms.

But the US administration continues to back efforts by Britain, France and Germany to negotiate an end to Iranian uranium enrichment in return for energy and economic incentives.

Middle East experts who spoke at the Washington Institute conference after Mr Cheney's speech noted that US rhetoric against Iran was being sharply escalated.

"The language on Iran is quite significant," former Middle East presidential envoy Dennis Ross said.

"That's very strong words and it does have implications," he said.

Mr Cheney also accused Syria of using "bribery and intimidation" to undermine a free vote in Lebanon's upcoming presidential election. 

"Lebanon has the right to conduct the upcoming elections free of any foreign interference," he said, insisting that Washington would work with its allies "to preserve Lebanon's hard-won independence and to defeat the forces of extremism and terror".

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